



Patient information leaflet

Eyelid twitching (blepharospasm)

Blepharospasm is a type of focal (more localised) dystonia or involuntary and abnormal movement in which there is spasm of the muscles around the eyes causing uncontrollable blinking and closure of the eyelids. It may also be associated with contractions of other muscles of the face and jaw. This can cause grimacing when an affected patient tries to open their eyes.

It is a common condition, which may be very disabling by impairing vision and social interactions. About 400 people in the UK are affected although since the condition is difficult to diagnose, this figure may be higher. It tends to affect men and women although it is thought to be twice as common in women, usually between the ages of 50 and 70.

The cause of blepharospasm is not fully understood but it thought to involve 'miswiring' in the basal ganglia of the brain, which is involved in the co-ordination of eyelid opening and closing. It may be exacerbated by ocular disease such as dry eyes, blepharitis, trichiasis or other chronic ocular surface disease.

There is no cure at present for blepharospasm but a range of treatment options is available aimed at controlling symptoms. Any underlying causes such as irritating, misdirected eyelashes (trichiasis) should be addressed. Thereafter, the main treatment is injections of botulinum toxin. This has high rate of success in the short term with about three quarters of patients achieving significant relief. The effects only tend to last up to 2 to 3 months. Complications of botulinum toxin injections include ptosis (droopy upper eyelid), sagging lower lid (ectropion), dry eyes, watery eyes (epiphora), double vision (diplopia). These complications are usually temporary and wear off as the drug itself wears off. Other treatment options include oral medication and surgery.

Further information, advice and support can be found at The Dystonia Society, 46-47 Britton Street, London, EC1M 5UJ. (www.dystonia.org.uk).